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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1790

INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY PRIORITY

RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001284

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

DEPT FOR AID/OTI (RPORTER)

TREASURY PASS TO OFAC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL BL CO VE

SUBJECT: BRV OFAC DESIGNATIONS OVERSHADOWED BY EXPULSIONS,  
BOLIVIA TENSIONS

REF: SECSTATE 097316

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ,  
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶11. (SBU) The designations of three BRV officials as FARC supporters by the Office of Foreign Assets Control have been largely overshadowed by President Chavez's bellicose rumblings about support for Bolivian President Morales. Chavez made a series of statements on state media September 12 - 14 dismissing the Treasury Department designation of Hugo Carvajal Barrios, Henry Rangel Silva, and Ramon Rodriguez Chacin as unimportant. Chavez called the charges against the three individuals, "absurd...without any substance, and based in lies."

¶12. (SBU) Chavez called in to a talk show hosted by United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) steering committee member Vanessa Davies on September 12 and said Rodriguez Chacin's only contacts with the FARC were to facilitate the release of hostages. During his weekly television program 'Alo Presidente,' Chavez defended the three Venezuelan officials and said the United States was guilty of harboring terrorists for not extraditing to Venezuela Cuban-born Luis Posada Carriles.

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (C) Chavez spent much of the weekend of September 13 and 14 making speeches on national television in support of Morales. While his political support for Morales is genuine, Chavez's antics are also seen locally as an attempt to both distract attention from the Antonini trial in Miami and to energize his base in the run up to November local and regional elections. The timing of the OFAC designation was portrayed in the press as a tit-for-tat move in a larger diplomatic spat between the USG and BRV. Chavez has dismissed the OFAC designation, in part because of its timing, as just another in a series of "aggressive" acts against the BRV. Retaliation for the OFAC designations is still possible, but may be more subtle than the actions we have seen recently.

CAULFIELD